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C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 005258

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/30/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [KISL](#) [IZ](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: C-NE5-00725: UPDATE ON JORDANIAN CONFERENCE ON ISLAM

REF: A. STATE 121734

[B](#). AMMAN 04991

Classified By: CDA David Hale for Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: In separate meetings on June 28 and 29 with King Abdullah, National Security Advisor Saad Khayr, and special adviser to the King (and the King's first cousin) Prince Ghazi, Charge received an update on plans for the conference on "True Islam and its Role in Modern Society," to be held in Amman from July 4-6. Response to the conference from top clerics in the region has been positive; Ayatollah Sistani from Iraq has agreed to send a representative and Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah has signaled his support. Organizers hope the conference will remove religious cover for terrorism by issuing an agreed statement that clarifies who may issue a fatwa, rejects the labeling of anyone practicing the five pillars of Islam as an apostate, and declares that Muslims have a duty to obey the laws of their countries of residence. Further information is provided below. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) PARTICIPANTS: Approximately 170 representatives from all eight orthodox schools of Islamic jurisprudence (four Sunni, three Shia and a school known as Zahirism) from more than 40 countries will participate in the conference. These include the grand muftis/top Muslim clerics of Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Oman and Jordan, as well as influential imam Dr. Yusuf al-Qaradawi (a regular staple on Al-Jazeera and other satellite TV channels). Clerics from Saudi Arabia will also attend with the backing of Crown Prince Abdullah, who (according to Prince Ghazi) has thrown his support behind the conference. Of particular note, Iraqi Ayatollah Sistani has agreed to send Sayed Mohammad Musawi as his representative and is reportedly on board with the conference goals described below.

[1](#)3. (C) RATIONALE: King Abdullah views this conference as a means of containing Shia/Sunni violence in Iraq by depriving terrorists of religious cover. Prince Ghazi explained that the conditions were ripe for this conference because of a) the impact of 9/11 on the world, b) increasing disillusionment with radical Wahabi teachings, and c) the support of Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah. It was also, he said, an opportunity to extend an olive branch to the Shias of Iraq. He expressed his view that Iraqi Shia had been gravely "wronged," noting that while outrage often followed the death of one Iraqi Sunni, Shias were told to remain calm after thousands of their number had been killed. For this reason, he saw Sistani's green light for the conference as critically important. With respect to Saudi Wahabis, Ghazi said he "didn't care" what they thought about the conference as long as CP Abdullah had given his backing.

[1](#)4. (C) GOALS: According to Khayr, the conference will help rectify perceived Arab silence in the face of terrorism by releasing an agreed statement that will accomplish three main goals: 1) define who is, and who is not (e.g., no one from outside a recognized school of Islamic jurisprudence), qualified to issue a fatwa; 2) emphasize that no one may dispute the Islamic identity of (or label as an apostate) a self-professed Muslim who practices the five pillars of Islam; and 3) declare that Muslims should respect and abide by the laws of the country in which they reside as long as these laws are not directly contrary to Islam. Prince Ghazi confirmed these goals, stating that the consensus reached would be so well-grounded in the Koran and Islamic teachings that no one would be able to dispute it. He added that he hoped conference participants would also affirm that Muslims living in non-Islamic countries (so long as they are afforded full rights) have a duty to defend these countries against physical attacks, including attacks from other Muslims. (NOTE: A copy of a preliminary draft statement has been faxed to NEA/ELA. END NOTE.)

[1](#)5. (C) FOLLOW-ON STRATEGY: Once a joint statement embracing the above goals is signed at the conclusion of the conference, organizers anticipate that the leading clerics in attendance will issue individual fatwas that conform to the statement. Sistani has agreed to issue a sympathetic fatwa, as well. Prince Ghazi noted that the statement would be taken to the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in an attempt to obtain its formal endorsement. He envisioned the statement serving as the basis for a change in curriculum, from kindergarten to post-graduate studies, throughout the

Islamic world. He stressed that the conference was integral to "winning the hearts and minds" of Muslims so as to defeat terrorism, and cautioned the U.S. to keep at arm's length from the event to avoid accusations of Western interference.  
HALE